

Encouraging Veterans to Share Their Perspective of History

Tampa, FL – As recently noted in Ken Burns' World War II PBS documentary "The War," discussing combat experiences can be a tough and therapeutic process for America's veterans. Each has their own valid reason for not sharing their specific story – ranging from the events being too painful to recall to not wanting to appear as a boaster.

Leo E. Ours, Jr., author of the new book, "Hospital on Wheels: World War II MASH," believes it is important to document each veteran's personal perspective of historical episodes. Leo's father served as a medical and surgical technician in World War II, but remained silent about his experiences for 63 years.

"My father told us little about this participation in the war with the 662nd Medical Clearing Company following Patton's 3rd Army across Europe," reveals Leo. "On some occasions he would relate a humorous memory, but usually when asked he would say he did not want to remember those days." The catalyst for Leo's father opening up was the recovery of his military duffle bag, which had been lost for 54 years.

"I was so moved and intrigued by his stories that I felt compelled to record an oral history, and later a written history with the book, of his service to our country," proudly explains Leo. He continues, "Americans cannot forget the heroes who died on the battlefields so we must gather the spoken history of our service people and their families to fully document the details of our history."

Recalling memories of those lost in battle can be extremely hard to discuss, says Leo. "As they returned home, many veterans simply wanted to resume the lives they had postponed and to participate in the freedom they helped to guarantee."

As potential remedy for their hesitancy to share their recollections, Leo developed a number of ideas that could serve as an "ice-breaker" to open the floodgates:

1. Ask if they would like to discuss the war so their family will have a record of their service for future generations
2. Find a movie of the war or battle they may have taken part in and use it to stimulate discussion by asking if it portrays the events correctly
3. Inquire about the men and women in old military photos and explore what was going on when the picture was taken
4. Detailed questions about uniforms and medals can spur on dialogue about military service
5. Use a recent war news story to spark a discussion about their war

"If you hit a sensitive subject, back off and have a secondary list of topics the veteran may feel more comfortable discussing," adds Leo, who offers more suggestions online at www.HospitalOnWheels.com. He adds that the listener should make suitable arrangements to record the veteran's verbal history.

"My goal was to print my father and mother's story," adds Leo. Now he is asking others to do the same. Leo points out that a 1973 St. Louis fire at the National Archives and Records Administration destroyed many WWII records, "If the government lost these important pieces of history, it is up to the individual families to re-document it."

Leo motivationally declares, "They did their duty. Now we must do ours and help to fill-in the historical gaps; Even if it means retelling history one veteran at a time."

About the Author

Leo E. Ours, Jr. is the author of "Hospital on Wheels: World War II MASH," which is the true story of his father's travels as a medical technician with the 662nd Medical Clearing Company during WWII. The native of West Virginia attended Glenville State College where he received his Bachelor's degree. As an information technology manager, Leo led project teams in developing multiple State of Florida technology projects. He has prepared countless software application manuals, professional association articles and studies. Leo currently lives in Tampa, Florida, and he maintains WWII photos and ideas on getting veterans to share their stories at www.HospitalOnWheels.com.

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